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ABSTRACT

This abstract summarizes recent statistics on those needing assistance in Activities of Daily Living (ADLs), along with participation rates for various proposed benefit programs, based on an analysis of the 1990-91 Survey of Income and Program Participation. Analysis indicates: (1) an estimated 1.9 percent of the population has difficulty performing one or more ADLs, but does not need assistance: (2) 1.9 percent needs help with at least one ADL, more than half of this percentage requires assistance with two or more ADLs; (3) 2.7 million adults need help taking a bath or shower, the most common ADL assistance needed; (4) spouses are most often the primary providers, followed by daughters and other relatives; (5) an estimated 9.2 percent of the population needing ADL assistance uses paid providers as the primary source of assistance; (6) 61 percent of the people needing personal assistance are aged 65 or older; (7) women are more likely than men to require personal assistance; and (8) African Americans have the highest rate of assistance needs at 2.8 percent. Further analysis indicates that federal program eligibility rates for personal assistance services could be reduced by expanding assistance only to the elderly or people living below the poverty line. (CR)

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Disability Statistics Abstract
Number 18

Need for Assistance in the Activities of Daily Living

by Jae Kennedy, Mitchell P. LaPlante, and H. Stephen Kaye

The Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) are a set of basic self-maintenance activities considered essential for everyday functioning: bathing, dressing, eating, using the toilet, and transferring (getting into or out of a bed or chair). Some 7.3 million adults aged 15 and over, 3.7 percent of the United States population residing in households, have difficulty performing one or more of these activities, over half of whom (3.7 million) require the assistance of another person to perform them. People with ADL limitations, and in particular those needing assistance, are considered to have fairly severe disabilities, and are therefore of special interest to policy-makers.

This abstract, based on an analysis of the 1990–91 Survey of Income and Program Participation, presents a profile of those needing assistance in ADLs, along with participation rates for various proposed benefit programs. The SIPP is a household survey of the noninstitutional United States population administered by the Census Bureau.

Some 3.7 million adults residing in households need help from another person in activities of daily living.

Table 1 shows the number of people and proportion of the population aged 15 and above experiencing various levels of ADL limitation. An estimated 1.9 percent of the population have difficulty performing 1 or more ADLs, but do not need assistance. Another 1.9 percent need help with at least one ADL, more than half of whom require assistance with 2 or more ADLs.

Specific assistance needs are shown in Table 2. Some 2.7 million American adults need help from another person in taking a bath or shower, the most common activity for which the assistance is needed. Next most common are dressing (2.1 million) and transferring (2.0 million). A much smaller number (1.2 million) need assistance in order to use the toilet, and only 0.5 million need help eating.

Primary sources of assistance are indicated in Figure 1. Spouses are most often the primary providers (38.0 percent), followed by daughters (19.4 percent) and other relatives (11.6 percent). An estimated 9.2 percent of the population needing ADL assistance use paid providers as their primary source of assistance. Sons are primary providers for 8.0 percent of the population. Thus, it is clear that family members, who are the primary source of assistance 82.5 percent of the time, face the main responsibility for helping those with ADL limitations.

Characteristics of the Population Needing Assistance

As shown in Table 3, the likelihood of needing ADL assistance increases markedly with age, from 0.3 percent at ages 15–24 to 9.6 percent at ages 75–84, rising dramatically to nearly one-quarter (22.9 percent) of those aged 85 and

Family members are the main source of personal assistance.

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Table 1: ADL limitations and assistance needs among people aged 15 and over, 1991–92.

	Number of people (1000s)	Proportion of population (percent)
No ADL limitation	187,588	96.3
Limited in any ADL	7,273	3.7
Difficulty in 1 or more ADLs, but no assistance needed	3,597	1.9
Needs assistance, 1 or more	3,676	1.9
1 ADL	1,523	0.8
2 ADLs	765	0.4
3 ADLs	488	0.3
4 ADLs	585	0.3
5 ADLs	315	0.2

Source: 1990–91 Survey of Income and Program Participation.

Table 2: Personal assistance needs among people aged 15 and above, 1991–92.

Activity	Number of people (1000s)	Proportion of population (percent)
Transferring	2,022	1.0
Bathing	2,710	1.4
Dressing	2,057	1.1
Eating	487	0.3
Toileting	1,154	0.6

Source: 1990–91 Survey of Income and Program Participation.

above. Although only 15.7 percent of the adult noninstitutional population is 65 or older, this group accounts for 61.0 percent of those needing personal assistance. Fully 82.0 percent of those needing assistance are at least 44 years of age.

Women are more likely than men to require personal assistance—2.2 percent versus 1.5 percent. Differences in longevity are a key reason for the disparity, since women have significantly greater life expectancies than men. In all, women account for 61.5 percent of persons needing personal assistance in 1 or more ADLs.

A comparison of racial/ethnic groups shows that African Americans have the highest rate of assistance needs, 2.8 percent. Non-Hispanic whites have a rate of 1.9 percent, followed by those of Hispanic origin (1.3 percent). The lowest rate is observed among those belonging to other racial groups, 0.8 percent. Differences in the age distributions of these populations account for some of the disparity in rates.

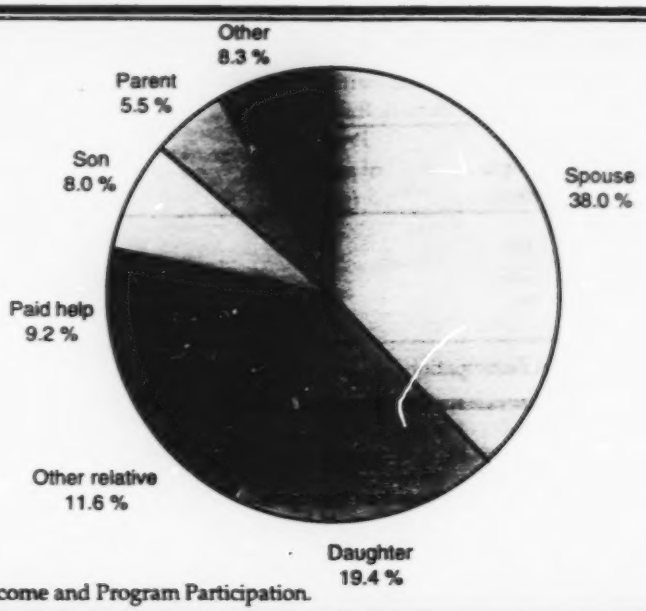
ADL Assistance Needs and Program Eligibility

Some state benefit programs pay for personal assistance services for those who especially need them, generally people with multiple ADL limitations. Proposed federal programs, aimed at expanding home- and community-based personal assistance services, have also focused on those needing assistance with at least 2 or 3 ADLs. The Clinton Administration's Health Security Act, for example, would have provided such services to persons needing help with at least three of the five ADLs listed in Table 2.

As shown in Table 4, 2.2 million American adults require assistance with 2 or more ADLs, while 1.4 million need assistance with 3 or more. One proposal for reducing these base figures for program eligibility is to expand benefits only to the elderly, among whom 1.3 million need assistance in at least 2 ADLs, with 0.9 million needing assistance in at least 3. Another proposed eligibility criterion is poverty. Among people living below the poverty line, 0.5 million need assistance in 2 or more ADLs and 0.3 million need assistance in 3 or more.

Since 3.7 million Americans require some form of personal

Figure 1: Primary Sources of Personal Assistance.



Source: 1990–91 Survey of Income and Program Participation.

Table 3: Prevalence of personal assistance needs among people aged 15 and above, by gender, age, race, and ethnicity, 1991–92.

	Total Population (1000s)	Needs Help with 1 or more ADLs	
		Number (1000s)	Proportion (percent)
Total	194,861	3,676	1.9
Age Group			
15–24	34,667	90	0.3
25–34	42,646	226	0.5
35–44	39,358	342	0.9
45–54	26,620	319	1.2
55–64	21,032	454	2.2
65–74	18,280	740	4.1
75–84	9,824	946	9.6
85+	2,434	556	22.9
Gender			
Male	93,541	1,422	1.5
Female	101,320	2,259	2.2
Race and ethnicity			
Hispanic	10,570	142	1.3
Non-Hispanic white	157,256	2,925	1.9
Non-Hispanic black	20,187	555	2.8
Non-Hispanic other	6,848	54	0.8

Source: 1990–91 Survey of Income and Program Participation.

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Table 4: Eligibility under various proposed benefit program criteria.

	Needs Help with 2 or more ADLs		Needs Help with 3 or more ADLs	
	Number of people (1000s)	Proportion of population (percent)	Number of people (1000s)	Proportion of population (percent)
Total	2,153	1.1	1,387	0.7
Age 65 or older	1,334	0.7	901	0.5
Family income < Poverty Level	531	0.3	305	0.2

Source: 1990–91 Survey of Income and Program Participation.

with the number of ADLs affected, which might accommodate all of the 3.7 million adults who need assistance with one or more ADLs.

Notes

All comparisons mentioned in this abstract are valid at the 95 percent level of confidence or better.

Credits

This abstract is based on the report by Kennedy, J. and LaPlante, M.P. *A profile of adults needing assistance with activities of daily living, 1991–1992.* Disability Statistics Report, (11). Washington, DC: National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, U.S. Department of Education.

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